Inside the Monster: Writings on the United States and American Imperialism
By José Martí

The Memorial Meeting in Honor of Karl Marx

La Nacion (Buenos Aires), May 13 and 16, 1883
Dated New York, March 29, 1883

Look at this large hall. Karl Marx is dead.[1] He deserves to be honored for declaring himself on the side of the weak. But the virtuous man is not the one who points out the damage and burns with generous anxiety to put it right; he is the one who teaches a gentle amendment of the injury.

The task of setting men in opposition against men is frightening. The compulsory brutalization of men for the profit of others stirs anger. But an outlet must be found for this anger, so that the brutality might cease before it overflows and terrifies. Look at this hall: dominating the room, surrounded by green leaves, is the picture of that ardent reformer, uniter of men of different peoples, and tireless, powerful organizer. The International was his creation:2 men of all nations come to honor him. The crowd, made up of valiant workers, the sight of whom affects and comforts, shows more muscles than jewels, and more honest faces than silk underwear. Labor beautifies: it is rejuvenating to see a farmworker, a blacksmith, or a seaman. By manipulating the forces of Nature, they become as beautiful as Nature is.

New York goes on being a kind of vortex: what boils up in the rest of the world, in New York drops down. Here they smile at one who flees; out there, they make him flee. As a result of this kindness, a strength has come to this people. Karl Marx studied the methods of setting the world on new foundations, and wakened those who were asleep, and showed them how to cast down the broken props. But being in a hurry, with his understanding somewhat clouded, he did not see that children who do not have a natural, slow, and painful gestation are not born viable, whether they come from the bosom of the people in history, or from the wombs of women in the home. Here are the good friends of Karl Marx, who was not only a titanic stimulater of the wrath of European workers, but also showed great insight into the causes of human misery and the destiny of men, a man driven by a burning desire to do good. He saw in everyone what he carried in himself: rebellion, the highest ideals, struggle.

Here is Schevitsch,[3] a journalist: see how he speaks: reflections of the sensitive, radiant Bakunin[4] reach him: he begins to speak in English; he addresses others in German. Dah! dah! his compatriots reply enthusiastically from their scats when he speaks to them in Russian.[5] The Russians are the whip of the Reform-no more! these impatient and generous men, tarnished with anger, are not the ones to cement the new world: they arc the spur, and prick like the voice of a conscience

which might be falling asleep: but the steel of the spur cannot be used as a construction hammer.

Here is Swinton,[6] an old man inflamed by injustice, who saw in Karl Marx the grandeur of mountains and the light of Socrates.[7] Here is the German Johann Most,[8] persistent and unlovable shouter, lighter of bonfires, who does not carry in his right hand the balm to heal the wounds inflicted by his left. So many people have come to hear them that the hall overflows and they spill out into the street. Choral societies are singing. Among so many men, there are many women. With applause, they repeat in chorus quotations from Karl Marx on posters hanging on the walls.[9] Millot,[10] a Frenchman, says something lovely: "Liberty has fallen many times in France, but it has risen more beautiful from each descent." Johann Most speaks fanatic words: "From the time that I read Marx's book in a Saxon prison, 1 took up the sword against human vampires."[11] Says McGuire:[12] "Rejoice to sec united, without hatred, so many men of all countries. All the workers of the world belong to a single nation, and do not quarrel among themselves but are united against those who oppress them. Rejoice to have seen six thousand French and English workers meeting together near what had been the ominous Paris Bastille."[13] A Bohemian speaks.[14] A letter of Henry George[15] is read—the famous economist, friend to the distressed, loved by the people, famous here and in England. And with salvos of thunderous applause and frenzied hurrahs, the fervent assembly rises in one unanimous movement, while from the platform two men with open countenance and glance of Toledo steel read out in German and English the resolutions with which the whole meeting ends-in which Karl Marx is named the most noble hero and most powerful thinker of the world of labor.16 Music sounds; choirs resound; but note that these are not the sounds of peace.

FOOTNOTES

1. Karl Marx (1818-1883), founder of scientific socialism, one of the most influential thinkers of all times, died in London on March 14, 1883. In New York City the Cooper Union was thronged on March 20, 1883, to honor his memory. Initiated by the Central Labor Union of Greater New York and Vicinity, it was the outstanding memorial event held anywhere in the world in the weeks immediately following Marx's death. (For a discussion of the reaction to Marx's death, including the full proceedings of the Cooper Union Memorial Meeting, see Philip S. Foner, When Karl Marx Died: Comments in 1883 [New York, 1973].)

2. Marti is referring to the International Workingmen's Association, the "First International." founded by Marx in 1864 and whose first conference was held in London in September 1865. A number of conferences took place in subsequent years, and after a struggle for control between followers of Marx and the anarchist adherents of Bakunin, its (General Council was transferred to the United States, where it continued to exist until 1876.

3. Sergius E. Schevitsch was a Russian-American socialist, leader of the Socialist Labor Party, and editor of the New Yorker Volkszeitung, its daily organ. He is called "Lecovitch" in Marti's account, but this may have been a printer's error.

4. Michael Bakunin (1814-1876), Russian anarchist leader. He came to the United States briefly

in 1860, but went on to London, which became his main base of operations. In Russia his ideas were associated with "Nihilism."

5. Schevitsch spoke in Russian in order, he said, "to carry out the International idea of the meeting." and closed his address in German after beginning in English.

6. John Swinton had fought with John Brown in Kansas, had been managing editor of the New York Times during the Civil War and chief editorial writer for the New York Sun, for which he wrote an interview with Karl Marx on September 6, 1880. In 1883, Swinton resigned his lucrative post with the Sun, and until August 21, 1887, when it ceased publication, issued John Swtnton's Paper, the outstanding labor paper of the 1880s. Swinton died in 1901 at the age of seventy-one. He published an autobiography, Sinking for Life (1894).

7. Socrates (469-399 B.C.), Athenian philosopher and leading figure in Plato's Dialogues who suffered death by drinking hemlock, having been accused of fostering impious ideas among the youth of Athens.

8. Johann Joseph Most (1846-1906), a bookbinder by trade, was a socialist who became an anarchist. After having been expelled from the German Social-Democratic Party in 1880, Most went first to England and then in 1883 to the United States where he became the leading anarchist in the country and published the anarchist journal Treibeit. For further discussion of Most, see below, p. 304.

9. On the walls were large signs, especially one with the famous words "Workingmen of All Countries, Unite!" from The Communist Manifesto, written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848

10. Theodore Millot, a bookbinder, who had been secretary of Section 2 of the First International in the United States.

11. Just what was "fanatic" about these words is not clear.

12. Peter J. McGuire, born in 1852; influenced by German-American socialists, he joined the Lassallcan movement, but later supported the trade union principles of the International. He organized the Eng-lish-spcaking branch of the Socialist labor Party in 1876, and the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners in 1881. lie is known as the father of Labor Day, but this is contested by those who favor Matthew MacGuire, a trade unionist in New Jersey. Marti spells his name Magure, but this, too, may have been a printer's error.

13. McGuire was referring to delegates from Manchester and Liverpool, England, sent by the British trade unions to Parts to inform the French workers that the British workers wanted no more war between the two countries. The meeting of 6,000 men, McGuire declared, "was held close by the Bastille."

14. Joseph Bunta, leader of the Bohemian Section of the First Inter national, addressed the meeting in his native language.

15. Henry George (1839-1897), celebrated author of Progress and Poverty (1879), which became one of the most widely read books on political economy in the United States and influenced many in Europe. George argued that land belonged to society, which created its value and that if it were properly taxed, through the "Single Tax," poverty could be eliminated. In the fall of 1886 George ran for mayor of New York on the United Labor Party ticket and was almost elected. For further discussion of Henry George, see below, p. 264.

16. The resolutions, read by Phillip Van Patten in English and Justus Schwab in German, and

adopted unanimously, deplored the death of Marx "as a grievous and irreparable loss to the cause of Labor and Freedom," promised to keep his name and works "ever in remembrance, and to do our utmost for the dissemination of the ideas given by him to the world," and pledged "to dedicate our lives to the cause of which he was the pioneer, the struggle in which he left so noble a record, and never at any moment to forget his grand appeal: Workingmen of tbe World. Unite!"